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INTRODUCTION

1. The Chairman of the ACC Subcommittee on Nutrition (SCN), Dr. Richard Jolly, welcomed all participants and opened the twenty-fourth session. He reviewed the highlights of 1996, including the World Food Summit and the release by SCN of the Update on the World Nutrition Situation 1996. The Advisory Group on Nutrition had met at Ottawa in November 1996, and Dr. Jolly thanked the Micronutrient Initiative for hosting that meeting. In addition, two working group meetings had been held, on nutrition of refugees and displaced people at Dublin, and on breastfeeding and complementary feeding at the time of the World Alliance for Breastfeeeding Action (WABA) Forum at Bangkok.

2. Dr. Jolly reminded the group that key actions that SCN has undertaken in the past have been strategic in affecting both country and international action. In relation to those mainstream activities, SCN has harmonized activities within the United Nations system and among bilaterals, and its practical achievements have been impressive. Among the most important topics for the twenty-fourth session were (a) to address the apparent slowdown in nutritional progress, possibly in the form of a statement, (b) to agree on a process for responding to nutrition challenges in twenty-first century by reviewing the proposal of the Advisory Group, (c) to review the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) progress report on the follow-up to the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) and decide how the report should be forwarded, and finally (d) for the executive session to consider the question of what can be done to maximize effectiveness in the United Nations system.

3. Other suggestions from SCN members called for improved coordination and communication; improved working group sessions; ensuring that SCN fulfils its watchdog role with respect to such issues as rights and refugees; and consideration of how SCN can effectively support training and institution-building.

4. There is an overriding need for SCN to establish a common front on nutrition based on the knowledge of the numerous key issues and priorities that unite agencies; in so doing, a strong role for nutrition in the restructuring of the United Nations needs to be sought.

5. The Technical Secretary, Dr. Sonya Rabeneck, highlighted the three main findings of the questionnaire that had been completed at the twenty-third session at Accra: that the Advisory Group on Nutrition should achieve greater visibility, that working groups should follow a weekend schedule, and that sessions should be chaired more firmly.

I. MATTERS FOR THE ATTENTION OF CCPOQ AND ACC

A. Principles of work

6. The Chairman drew the attention of SCN to two letters received from the Secretary of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational

Questions (CCPOQ), the first one dated 18 November 1996, reflecting discussions in CCPOQ at its ninth session (New York, 16-20 September 1996), in which CCPOQ stressed the need for SCN to fully utilize the existing capabilities of the participating agencies for all activities initiated by SCN, including those funded by external sources, and called on SCN to strengthen the interaction between the SCN secretariat and the participating agencies, as well as to explore new approaches for clearer cooperation among United Nations agencies and bilateral agencies at the regional and country levels. In a similar vein, the letter dated 5 December 1996 from the Secretary of CCPOQ to all secretaries of ACC requested subcommittees to clarify the nature of the target audience, outputs and financing, enumerating a number of points with coordination aspects at several levels; the purpose of that letter was to request SCN to review its working arrangements.

7. SCN was set up by ACC with a mandate to carry out a number of functions, one of which is the coordination of tasks among United Nations agencies in the field of nutrition, generally involving close cooperation with those agencies. Members of SCN emphasized the almost continuous review of SCN working arrangements, the most recent one completed in 1996 by an evaluation team on behalf of a group of bilateral agencies. One of the conclusions of the evaluation team was that SCN serves as a point of convergence, bringing together a number of players in nutrition and carrying out in an objective manner certain functions that agencies cannot do alone. It is important to understand all aspects of SCN activities to appreciate the several forms of inter-agency coordination carried out by SCN. For example, SCN has nine working groups to keep under review such questions as micronutrients, breastfeeding, nutrition of refugees and displaced people, and household food security. Those working groups meet regularly, keeping participants abreast of developments in United Nations organizations, as well as developments in the subject under review. The working groups report to SCN plenary sessions. The availability of national experts to serve on the Advisory Group on Nutrition enhances the quality of the tasks carried out by SCN. SCN is well regarded by bilateral organizations at a time when other components of the United Nations are being criticized.

8. In connection with its programme budget review, SCN will undertake to increase the involvement of United Nations agencies in preparing its reports. Timeliness and high quality, however, will remain essential characteristics of the SCN work programme. A number of such participatory activities are already under way, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO and FAO supplying data for the Report on the World Nutrition Situation. A new approach would be for SCN to have its own World Wide Web site, which would facilitate exchange of information and would be linked to the Web sites of the agencies.

9. Coordination at the country level is important, and continues to be less than ideal in at least some locations. It would be useful for one agency to take the lead in convening in a given location all United Nations and bilateral agencies interested in particular aspects of nutrition. After the initial contact, one agency could be charged with ensuring continuous contact. It was decided that the Chairman will write a letter from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator's Office to all resident coordinators, requesting them to take the lead in arranging periodic meetings of local representatives of agencies concerned with nutrition, as a follow-up to a

similar letter sent in 1996. Bilateral agencies could benefit from participating with United Nations agencies in such coordination efforts at the local level.

B. Programme and budget 1998-1999

10. The programme and budget presented consisted of two components, the first covering SCN core activities, including the Office of the Technical Secretary and the Advisory Group on Nutrition, the second comprising a listing of programme activities to be carried out subject to funds being raised. In respect of core activities, the budget document included a brief summary of the financial situation during the current biennium, for which FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have reduced their contributions to zero and for which WHO has reduced its contribution to $10,000, together causing a reduction in contributions of $268,000; the budget for 1996-1997 has accordingly been reduced to $819,000. Owing to the post of Technical Secretary being vacant for seven months, favourable changes in exchange rates and a number of other factors, it is hoped to be able to meet expenses during the current biennium, but that figure is clearly not a baseline for future budgeting.

11. The budget proposed was compared with the expenditures incurred in the 1994-1995 biennium. The 1998-1999 figure of $976,000 was compared with $900,200 in 1994-1995, the difference being almost entirely due to four Advisory Group meetings being budgeted for 1998-1999 as compared with two meetings in 1994-1995. Every effort will be made to hold Advisory Group meetings in conjunction with other meetings and conferences. It was noted with satisfaction that one Advisory Group meeting in each of the three years 1996, 1997 and 1998 will be held at almost no cost to the SCN core budget. The Government of Norway, in inviting SCN to hold its twenty-fifth session at Oslo, has offered to pay not only the travel expenses of the SCN staff needed to service the meeting but also the full cost of the Advisory Group meeting to be held in conjunction with the twenty-fifth session; accordingly, the effective cost to SCN of holding four meetings of the Advisory Group during the biennium 1998-1999 will be substantially reduced. It was recognized that in comparison with 1994-1995, the proposed 1998-1999 budget represents essentially no growth and a modest decline in real terms.

12. A number of agencies emphasized the importance of cost-efficiency and suggested that cost-cutting measures be adopted, such as relying on electronic mail, fax and telephone as much as possible, without reducing the activities or effectiveness of SCN work. FAO suggested holding SCN sessions every two years rather than annually, and reducing the number of Advisory Group meetings to two per biennium. There was no support for reducing the meeting frequency of SCN; as regards the Advisory Group, it was noted that one of the two meetings for 1998 is to be funded by external sources. The Technical Secretary expressed a firm commitment to explore every opportunity for economies in carrying out the agreed programme of activities.

13. As to the mode of operations, there was strong support for continuation of an independent secretariat not subject to any one agency's views; that autonomy

has contributed to the high quality of SCN reports and has greatly enhanced the coordinating ability of SCN. A secretariat consisting of a Technical Secretary and an administrative assistant is the minimum staffing possible for the discharge of the SCN core functions.

14. It should be the policy of SCN to ensure that all technical documents issued by or in the name of SCN receive appropriate peer review to maintain credibility and quality control. Normally, a document should be sent to at least two knowledgeable people for review, as well as to the relevant technical United Nations agencies, and their comments should be taken into consideration by the secretariat and, if necessary, by the author(s). Often such external review will already have been done before the manuscript reaches the secretariat and the reviewers' comments included; if not, the manuscript should be distributed by the secretariat for that purpose. A roster of qualified and available reviewers in the various fields and disciplines concerned should gradually be developed by the secretariat.

15. As to financing, it was proposed in the budget document prepared by the secretariat that FAO and IFAD restore funding to half their 1994-1995 contribution levels, and that, similarly, WHO raise its contribution to half the 1994-1995 level. All other participating organizations would revert for 1998-1999 to their 1994-1995 levels, except UNDP, which had agreed to raise its contribution, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was a new contributor in 1996-1997.

16. FAO indicated that no official FAO decision has been taken for the 1998-1999 FAO programme of work and budget. However, FAO added that the current proposed FAO contribution to SCN was the same as for the last biennium 1996-1997, and that no funds had been identified for commitment to SCN. The important role of FAO in the field of nutrition was fully recognized by all participating agencies. Accordingly, FAO was requested to reconsider its position on the matter of its contribution.[1]

17. Hope was also expressed by the WHO representative that in spite of its own difficult financial situation and its current inability to increase its current contribution, WHO would return to making a more meaningful financial contribution to SCN. The provision of accommodation and administrative services by WHO was noted with appreciation. It was agreed that other non-paying agencies should make every effort to fund SCN. The representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) invited the Chairman to contact the IAEA Director-General to request core support. With respect to those United Nations organizations that are currently participating in SCN work but are not contributing to the budget, it was agreed that every effort should be made to encourage them to make a meaningful financial contribution as soon as possible.

18. United Nations agencies, except for FAO, supported the programme of activities and the core budget as presented, most of them strongly. Several were concerned that the core budget is too modest in view of the needs for work in response to the vast problem of malnutrition. FAO informed SCN that it objects to the proposed budget and work plan, as currently drafted. Accordingly, the core budget was approved, subject to availability of funding, and the FAO objection was noted.

19. As regards the second component of the programme budget - the activities to be carried out subject to funds raised - several agencies emphasized the importance of the serial Report on the World Nutrition Situation. Similarly, the Refugee Nutrition Information System is of high quality and will continue. French translation is being explored for the 1998-1999 biennium. The policy harmonization programme element provides for publication of SCN workshop reports, such as workshops of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences and special studies. In the 1998-1999 biennium, the following work will be undertaken: (a) role of the United Nations in the nutrition challenge of the twenty-first century; (b) a series of technical briefs on programmatic relevance; (c) an in-depth look at ICN impact and achievement of goals; (d) a new programmatic orientation to reducing malnutrition; and (e) a World Wide Web site for SCN. SCN News would again be issued twice a year; the possibility of Internet access for SCN News would be looked into, but in view of its wide readership in developing countries, hard copy versions would be retained. No specific programme budget was presented for tracking flows of resources to nutrition or for research and training.

20. Indications of financial support for several priority activities were made by bilaterals, notably for the Report on the World Nutrition Situation, the Refugee Nutrition Information System, and SCN News. There was broad support for the work programme (except from FAO), and all work activities were retained.

21. It was noted that bilateral agencies, as well as United Nations agencies, give timely and significant contributions to extrabudgetary activities. It was agreed that future budgets would show extrabudgetary funds, including source of income and expenditures. If currently unanticipated extrabudgetary funds become available for activities closely related to SCN programmes, they can be accepted and reported at the next session.

22. SCN approved the programme of extrabudgetary activities subject to funds becoming available, it being understood that minor alterations may be made in light of available funds and other factors. In its studies, SCN would draw on the capacity of the agencies as much as possible.

C. Nutrition in the World Health Organization

23. Many concerns and queries were expressed concerning the status of the WHO Division of Food and Nutrition (FNU), which had been established in 1993 following the International Conference on Nutrition. In response to the Chairman's request for clarification, the WHO representative indicated that, as part of WHO restructuring endeavours and cost-efficiency measures, one option currently being considered by the Director-General of WHO is to disestablish the FNU Division and disperse its three constituent programmes - nutrition, food safety, and food aid - to other divisions or areas in WHO. Nutrition was given priority programme status within WHO in 1991, and in 1995 the WHO Executive Board and World Health Assembly emphasized nutrition as a priority programme area, indicating the WHO commitment to the massive global problems of malnutrition, food contamination and food insecurity.

24. Although respecting the full authority of WHO and its Director-General in making organizational arrangements, several participants expressed concern at those developments, which in some measure appear to be driven by a desire to economize. At a time when malnutrition is giving rise to increasing concern, it could appear that WHO was de-emphasizing the importance of nutrition by giving it less visibility. Bilateral agencies and members of the Advisory Group on Nutrition conveyed their concern that inappropriate messages would be sent to national Governments regarding the role of nutrition in health and development.

25. The Chairman undertook, on his next visit to Geneva, to convey to the responsible Assistant Director-General of WHO the concerns expressed in SCN, and - if appropriate - to convey those concerns in writing.

D. Members of the Advisory Group on Nutrition

26. The Chairman explained that there were three vacancies on the eight-member Advisory Group on Nutrition: Simon Maxwell had left at the end of 1996, Sadia Chowdhury would complete her term in July 1997, and Jak Jervell would complete three consecutive terms in mid-1998. The Chairman informed SCN that 18 nominations had been received and evaluated. Taking a number of factors into account, he proposed to appoint Lawrence Haddad, an economist (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), and Lilian Marovatzanga, a food scientist (Zimbabwe).

27. As to the third prospective vacancy, he welcomed nominations from all active participants in SCN. Candidates should have qualifications in communications and social sciences. The Technical Secretary, in calling for nominations, was asked to present in matrix form the professional skills of current members and the skills required of prospective candidates. Bilateral agencies would be invited to participate in the evaluation process.

28. SCN endorsed the nominations of the two candidates, as well as the appointments of Ricardo Uauy as Chairperson of the Advisory Group on Nutrition and Ruth Oniango as Vice-Chairperson. Dr. Jolly paid tribute to the outgoing Chairperson, Julia Tagwireyi, for her outstanding service to the Advisory Group and the valuable advice she has provided to SCN.

E. Dates and venue of the twenty-fifth session

29. The representative of Norway, on behalf of his Government, invited SCN to hold its twenty-fifth session at Oslo. In addition to providing the customary host facilities for meetings, the Government of Norway would meet the expenses of the Advisory Group meeting at Oslo at the time of the SCN session, as well as the travel expenses of the secretariat. SCN accepted with gratitude the generous offer of the Government of Norway, which SCN saw as an expression of the Government's continuing commitment to international nutrition. Although several participants had been reviewing the venue of the next session with an eye to minimizing expenses, it was clear that the offer of the Government of Norway would materially relieve the SCN budget and minimize costs for other participants. FAO applauded the action. The Chairman asked the representative

of Norway to convey SCN appreciation of the generous offer to his Government. SCN agreed on the following dates for the meeting: 30 March-3 April 1998.

30. It was decided that the title for the twenty-fifth session symposium would be "Challenges for the twenty-first century: a gender perspective on nutrition through the life cycle". The symposium will be organized by the secretariat.

31. In connection with its twenty-fifth session, a number of working groups will be meeting, and a symposium will be held prior to the session. SCN reviewed a number of aspects of the functioning of the working groups, such as membership; purpose (recommendations or information exchange); and ability to meet between SCN sessions, thus reducing time pressure. Following an initiative made at the twenty-third session to codify practices, it was agreed that the Technical Secretary will draft rules for working groups, for consideration by SCN at its twenty-fifth session.

F. Chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Nutrition

32. Dr. R. Jolly had been nominated Chairman of the Subcommittee at the twenty-second session, and CCPOQ had approved the nomination for the two-year period 1 January 1996-31 December 1997.

33. On the proposal of FAO, seconded by WHO, SCN decided unanimously and by acclamation to nominate Dr. Jolly for a second two-year term, from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 1999.

II. WORK IN PROGRESS: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Third report on the World Nutrition Situation

34. There are four draft chapters as follows: (a) "Update of nutrition situation 1996", (b) "Interpretation of current trends in malnutrition", (c) "Micronutrients", and (d) "Nutrition in refugees and displaced people". The Report will be published in late June 1997. The secretariat requested guidance on the content and orientation of the latter three chapters, for which written comments were requested by the end of April 1997.

35. The chapter on nutrition of refugees and displaced people was presented by the SCN secretariat. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Food Programme (WFP) representatives expressed concern that the document does not adequately highlight the achievements made in addressing the food needs of refugees and internally displaced people. WFP stated that targeted emergency requirements, as agreed upon between partners in relief operations, have generally been met, although there is room for improvement in the quality of the rations. The chapter should also describe the real constraints faced in relief operations related to access, security and distribution systems, which may result in rations not reaching beneficiaries in certain conditions. It was felt that data on refugees should be presented in the context of the local host population, which in some cases are more deprived than refugees. The important roles of the host Government and the refugees

themselves should be acknowledged. It was further stated that refugee situations create an artificial economy in many places, putting UNHCR in a dilemma. Finally, it was suggested that the Report highlight the worsening situation and high nutritional risk among internally displaced people.

36. The World Bank noted that nutrition problems are becoming more severe, and hoped that the findings of this chapter could be referred to ACC. The fact that there is a table covering 'old' micronutrient deficiencies such as beri-beri and scurvy, shows that there is a serious problem. There is also a need for agency self-criticism in reporting. The ICN goal of ending famine and famine-related deaths by the end of the decade should be referred to in the chapter.

37. In conclusion, the SCN Chairman suggested that the chapter contains a lot of excellent material, but it would be helpful for a steering committee to be established to decide how to structure it, including representatives of WFP and UNHCR. It would also be useful if FAO could communicate relevant data from its missions. In terms of substance, the chapter should be an overview of the problems, with conclusions for policy and information-gathering action. Target levels in relation to needs should be highlighted, with a discussion of how such targets have been formulated as well as fulfilled.

38. The draft chapter on micronutrients was presented by Dr. Mahshid Lotfi of the Micronutrient Initiative (MI). The Chairman thanked MI for this work which was done in a very limited time period, and requested an explanation of the causes of the divergent trends, such as the improvement 1985-1990 and the stagnation thereafter to 1995. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) expressed concern about applying projection models used for anthropometry to vitamin A. UNICEF pointed out that messages arising from the analysis of trends in clinical vitamin A deficiency need to be carefully considered so that premature withdrawal of support to programmes does not occur. Some SCN members questioned the similarities shown between vitamin A trends and IMR.

39. The Micronutrient Initiative asked for any additional data to be submitted, especially from UNICEF, as well as food balance sheet data from FAO, and agreed to review the examination of causes and interpretation of data. The Chairman requested that comments be sent to MI, and that the chapter be revised and circulated to agencies by the end of April 1997.

B. Report of the Advisory Group on Nutrition

40. The Chairperson of the Advisory Group introduced the report of the meeting held at Ottawa in November 1996. The Advisory Group recognizes that 'more of the same' is not enough, and that new approaches are needed for dealing with nutrition problems in the twenty-first century.

41. SCN considered four self-standing items raised by the Advisory Group. Firstly, the Advisory Group proposal 'New programme orientations for reducing malnutrition' was reviewed by SCN and subsequently approved. The objectives were to (a) review current efforts by SCN agencies to reduce malnutrition, (b) examine the need for harmonization in present programmatic approaches to

reduce malnutrition, and (c) identify potential gaps in programme implementation and how to address them.

42. The SCN secretariat will request information from agencies on frameworks for reducing malnutrition, especially programmatic orientations. That material will be critically reviewed by the Advisory Group, in collaboration with agencies, and will be discussed at the next Advisory Group meeting at Montreal in July 1997. That review will identify the need for coordination at the programme implementation level, as well as missing links among different approaches to operations. The Advisory Group will subsequently evaluate the need for action to better meet the objective of improving outcomes and impacts of programmes. Finally, with the support of the United Nations University (UNU)/IUNS, the Advisory Group could convene a workshop in early 1998 to examine the technical and programmatic aspects that need to be resolved for better outcomes. That will be done in consultation with the relevant SCN agencies (WHO, UNICEF, FAO). Progress will be reported at the next SCN meeting. The proposed work has no budgetary implications for SCN for the current biennium.

43. Second, reducing mortality rates of severely malnourished children was discussed. SCN did not want to revive the nutrition rehabilitation centres of the past, and it was agreed that recommendations found in the "10 steps" should continue to be field tested. The Advisory Group also agreed that that work should continue to be complementary to the WHO Integrated Management of Childhood Illness programme under its Division of Child Health and Development. It was mentioned that all children need adequate psychosocial stimulation, not just severely malnourished children. Finally, UNICEF and UNU spoke of their grave concern over the fact that the WHO manual on treatment of severely malnourished children remains in draft form despite having been in preparation for six years. The manual is not available in the field yet. WHO informed SCN that the manual has been completed and will be released shortly.

44. Third, regarding the revision of ACC Programme Classification, SCN approved the Advisory Group proposal that nutrition be better reflected in a revised categorization, which would also need to include the aspect of care. The Advisory Group proposal was as follows:

210 **Nutrition and Food**
- 211 Policies and Planning
- 212 Food Security[a]
- 213 Food Standards and Safety
- 214 Food and Nutrition during Emergencies
- 215 Nutrition Recommendations and Dietary Guidelines
- 216 Nutrition Intervention Programmes
- 217 Nutrition Information, Education and Communication
- 218 Applied Research and Training to improve programme effectiveness

[a] Inter alia, availability and accessibility to food at household and community levels.

45. Fourth, concerning the draft conflict of interest policy, SCN supported the Advisory Group suggestion for a policy to cover all activities that could be perceived to be a conflict of interest. FAO requested that it be made clear

that the agencies are members of SCN and that representatives are participants. FAO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggested that that policy might not apply to United Nations staff members, who are required to sign such a declaration on entry into the United Nations. In conclusion, it was agreed that eventually, the declaration will apply to SCN and working groups sponsored by or in the name of SCN and to the Advisory Group, bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations. The legal implications of United Nations and bilateral agencies signing will be explored by the Technical Secretary and discussed at the next Advisory Group meeting at Montreal. Institutional funding where the SCN member or participant is not directly involved need not be declared. The Advisory Group offered to test the application of the draft policy by filling out the declaration and filing it with the Secretariat.

46. Finally, SCN was informed that the dates of the next Advisory Group meeting were 26 and 27 July 1997, at Montreal, to coincide with the sixteenth IUNS Congress.

C. New challenges

1. Role of the United Nations in the nutrition challenge in the twenty-first century

47. SCN considered an Advisory Group proposal that sets out the goal, objectives, scope of work, implementation mechanisms, type of product and time schedule of a review exercise that looks forward to establishing future nutrition action priorities for the United Nations.

48. SCN recommended against "reinventing the wheel", but recommended that a notable independent leader be identified and charged with preparing a draft document for later review. The WHO representative suggested the inclusion of people who have worked at country level in countries where the nutrition situation has improved. There is a need to consider how today's successes are likely to be relevant to the future. WHO drew attention to the publication Health Issues in the Twenty-first Century and to the forthcoming World Health Report. The Micronutrient Initiative requested that the document highlight the way in which nutrition goals can be interwoven into broader developmental goals. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) proposed a strong focus on the nutrition of adolescent girls and reproductive health.

49. The World Bank strongly concurred with the idea of carrying out such work, and argued for an objective, self-critical view of what the agencies are doing in nutrition. The financial resources required will be considerable, but will have to be found since this is exactly the type of work that SCN should be engaged in. The UNU representative stated that the bilateral review could contribute to that exercise.

50. SCN considered subsequent revisions of The Nutrition Challenge in the Twenty-First Century: What Role for the United Nations? The eventual report would be structured according to the life cycle. Priorities for inclusion suggested by SCN included the hypothesized link between low birth weight and a heightened risk of cardiovascular disease mortality; the position of women;

reproductive health, including the link between nutrition and maternal mortality and the nutrition of adolescent girls; and urbanization. It was clarified that that work is not to replace the World Bank proposal for an evaluation of nutrition in the United Nations system; that proposal will be put aside and possibly reconsidered at the twenty-fifth session.

51. The Advisory Group responded by stating that this will be complementary to ongoing SCN agency activities. Agencies will be informed of the detailed outline as and when it is prepared, and will be asked for their comments. The Advisory Group requested the agencies to provide details of their perceived future priorities.

52. SCN approved the project provided that it does not put too much extra burden on the secretariat, that it takes account of relevant ongoing activities of the agencies, and that it retains a strong focus on current problems of undernutrition, which will undoubtedly persist into the twenty-first century. Finally, it was agreed that the Chairman should decide on how to proceed with identifying appropriate individuals in consultation with the Advisory Group. The SCN Chairman suggested revisiting this question at the Advisory Group meeting at Montreal in July 1997.

2. Sixteenth International Congress of Nutrition

53. Two proposals for an SCN presence in the Congress were discussed. First, the secretariat will pursue with the Congress Organizer whether time could be found for a workshop entitled 'New programme orientations for reducing malnutrition'. Such a workshop would deal with practical programmatic matters, and will have an operational theme.

54. Second, a joint FAO/WHO lecture is scheduled for lunchtime on Thursday, 31 July 1997, which will focus on ICN follow-up, and there is scope for other agencies' involvement in that session. The SCN Chairman agreed to discuss with FAO and WHO how SCN may have an input to this lecture, which was suggested in a discussion with FAO. Options include discussion of the work of SCN, as well as an update on the nutrition situation. A statement will be drafted by the secretariat and shared with member agencies for comments prior to the IUNS Congress.

3. New orientations to research and training to improve the effectiveness of nutrition programmes

55. The proposal 'New orientations to research and training to improve the effectiveness of nutrition programmes' was described by the AGN Chairperson, who suggested that this initiative might usefully find a home in SCN, perhaps as a working group.

56. SCN reaffirmed the priority that it attaches to capacity-building, and approved a proposal of the Advisory Group to hold a workshop on the theme 'New orientations to training and research to improve programme implementation' at the twenty-fifth session in Oslo.

D. Nutrition of refugees and internally displaced people

57. The meeting of the working group (Co-Chairs: Rita Bhatia (UNHCR) and Christine van Nieuwenhuyse (WFP)) took place at Dublin on 21 February 1997, hosted by CONCERN. This was done in accordance with guidelines set out at the session of SCN at Accra, where it was recommended that working group meetings be held outside the structure of the SCN annual session, if possible, and that such meetings would report to the SCN session for discussion.

58. UNHCR noted that there were 26 million refugees, displaced persons and returnees as of 1 January 1996, a marginal decrease from 1995 levels (27 million). That figure includes mainly refugees (13.2 million), but also returnees (3.3 million), internally displaced people (4.7 million) and others (4.9 million) - one out of every 220 people in the world. Their total budget was US$ 1.43 million.

59. The location of refugees and internally displaced people in Africa was highlighted, and it was noted that a large percentage of people requiring assistance is in Africa.

60. WFP assisted 45 million people in 1996, including 9.8 million refugees worldwide and 14.8 million internally displaced people or victims of natural disaster. There were 20.7 million people who benefited from development assistance. Of the US$ 1.5 billion spent by WFP in 1996, US$ 1.1 billion was on emergency assistance and US$ 0.4 billion was on development projects. 2.6 million tons of food were delivered. WFP underlined that targeted food needs have generally been met by the international community in terms of quantity of food, and voiced concerns related to paragraph 21 in the Advisory Group report, where it was stated that ration levels for refugees are low. WFP emphasized that it was the quality and not the quantity of the rations that should be improved.

61. The secretariat introduced the minutes of the Dublin working group meeting. It was explained that the working group focuses on issues related to the nutrition of refugees and internally displaced people. In 1992, the working group recommended regular reporting on the situation of refugees and internally displaced people, and the Report on the Nutrition Situation of Refugees and Internally Displaced People began publication in 1993. The Report is produced on a quarterly basis. For each situation, background is presented and available nutrition information is provided. Information comes from a wide variety of sources, both United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Some 15 to 20 non-governmental organizations contribute information to the Report.

62. One of the main objectives of the Report is advocacy. Other objectives include keeping those involved in humanitarian aid aware of the current situation, helping donors decide how to allocate available resources and highlight problems, and where appropriate, suggesting solutions. The Report provides comparisons between different emergency situations, and highlight trends over time.

63. The main decisions regarding the Report taken at the Dublin meeting were highlighted:

(a) The Report is very useful in documenting trends and calling attention to needs;

(b) The Report should remain in SCN, and should be overseen by the working group;

(c) The Report should expand to include more situations in Asia, then Eastern Europe;

(d) More analysis of food security issues should be included in the Report;

(e) Food aid shortfalls should be highlighted, by region;

(f) A request for a French version of the Report should be considered.

64. The budget of the Report was briefly discussed, and it was noted that both UNHCR and WFP contribute, in terms of both financial support and in-kind contributions of time and advice. Funds are also received from Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom.

65. SCN agreed with the decisions taken at the Dublin meeting, subject to the examination of budget implications. In particular, the recommendation that the Report continue to be prepared at the secretariat was felt to be appropriate. Reservations about that decision were expressed by FAO.

66. The issue of improving the targeting of food aid was discussed in the light of a decrease in the global delivery of food aid and in the face of growing worldwide needs. It was stated that it is necessary to better understand the socio-economic situation of the assisted beneficiaries in order to better assess their needs and to target available assistance. A food security assessment, based on a methodology developed by Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom), is being used regularly to provide better more complete information on the food security of beneficiaries. Those assessments, funded jointly by UNHCR and WFP, are being conducted in many areas prior to a joint food assessment mission. Workshops to familiarize the staff of both WFP and UNHCR with this methodology are also being planned jointly.

67. Performance indicators to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency programmes are being developed by WFP.

68. Training issues were discussed as a follow-up to the Accra meeting and the workshop at Machakos, Kenya, in 1994. Issues of local capacity-building and management in emergency situations were brought up. UNHCR, along with the International Agricultural Centre (IAC) in the Netherlands, is identifying an institution in Africa in which to hold a pilot training course on the theme 'Management of nutrition in emergencies'. WHO has also recently held a training course at Asmara, Eritrea. UNHCR is collaborating on that initiative with other United Nations agencies (WHO, UNICEF).

69. The issue of the acceptance and utilization of blended foods by refugees and internally displaced persons was discussed in the context of a follow-up to

a recommendation made at the Machakos workshop. A study to address the question "should we continue to distribute blended foods?" is being carried out in Nepal, Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania by UNHCR and OXFAM.

E. Iodine deficiency disorders

70. The International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD) reported on large-scale implementation of salt iodization in all regions of the world to prevent mental retardation in newborns in areas previously at risk of IDD. UNICEF, in particular, has been in the forefront of this global effort. ICCIDD also reported that there are now new normative values for thyroid volume measured by ultrasonography in iodine replete schoolchildren. Those new values were derived from a multicentre study conducted in Europe. They will be included in the WHO-UNICEF-ICCIDD publication Indicators for Assessing IDD and its Control.

71. The working group (Chair: Sultana Khanum, (WHO)) emphasized that the United Nations should play a strong and proactive role in the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders. Recommendations for SCN action included:

(a) A need for training programmes, including for laboratories, with decentralization and utilization of the regional/national resources;

(b) Coordination of efforts for the production of better test kits of iodine in urine and salt;

(c) Proactive involvement of all concerned United Nations agencies needs to be ensured.

72. WHO stated that the World Health Assembly recently adopted a resolution on monitoring and the implementation of sustainable programmes.

73. UNICEF felt that it is important to strengthen the iodization of salt at the production level, and that rapid assessments were very useful for monitoring purposes.

F. Nutrition, ethics and human rights

74. The working group (Chair: Urban Jonsson, (UNICEF ROSA); Secretary: Wenche Barth Eide, (WANAHR)) discussed three main subjects at its meeting, and made some recommendations to SCN. The right to food was discussed in the context of the follow-up to the World Food Summit. In particular, it was recalled that the Summit had recommended that Governments, in partnership with all actors of civil society:

(a) Make every effort to implement the provisions of article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and relevant provisions of other international and regional instruments;

(b) Invite the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the treaty body for the Covenant) to continue to monitor the specific measures provided for in article 11 of the Covenant;

(c) Invite appropriate specialized agencies of the United Nations to consider how they might contribute to the further realization of this right;

(d) Invite the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in collaboration with relevant specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and intergovernmental mechanisms, to better define the rights related to food in article 11 of the Covenant, and to propose ways to implement and realize those rights.

75. The experiences of members of the working group were then shared, and activities since the last meeting at Accra were discussed. It was felt that there is an urgent need for:

(a) Broad-based information and communication in society on the issue of nutrition and human rights;

(b) Clarification of operational issues, including reporting guidelines;

(c) Guidance in translation into national plans.

76. Action proposals included:

(a) Clarification of the content of the rights related to food in article 11 of the Covenant and the further development of the corresponding guidelines for the reporting by State Parties under article 16, along with the content of the right to food and reporting guidelines;

(b) Preparation of a strategy paper on information, education and communication concerning the right to adequate food to promote understanding of and support for the realization of food and nutrition rights;

(c) The symposium at the twenty-sixth SCN session in 1999, to be held in Latin America, should be devoted to the theme "Nutrition, ethics and human rights".

77. Based on the discussion that followed the presentation of the working group, it was decided that:

(a) The SCN Chairman should send a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights on possible joint SCN/UNHCHR working arrangements;

(b) A strategy paper on the right to adequate food should be prepared for the twenty-fifth SCN session, contingent on funding;

(c) UNHCHR should be invited to the next SCN session.

78. The possibility of having the symposium for the twenty-fifth session adopt the theme "Nutrition, ethics and human rights" was discussed. It was decided

that it was too early for a decision, but that that possibility, along with perhaps incorporating the World Food Summit goals for children, should be noted.

G. Iron deficiency

79. The working group (Chair: Nevin Scrimshaw, (UNU)) met and made the following recommendations:

(a) The high prevalence rates for iron deficiency anaemia in many developing countries constitute a public health emergency equivalent to epidemics of infectious disease, and have more lasting adverse consequences for survivors;

(b) The intervention approach must be multiple and integrated to include concurrently food fortification with iron, health measures to reduce conditions contributing to iron loss, iron fortification for vulnerable groups, and food-based approaches designed as a permanent solution to iron deficiency as a public health problem;

(c) The proposal to initiate an aggressive holistic approach to the serious problem of iron deficiency anaemia in Central Asia revealed in recent surveys is strongly endorsed, and should be a well-documented test of the practicality of current prevented strategies;

(d) The evidence for the role of maternal anaemia on maternal mortality and other pregnancy outcomes should be reviewed and given wide dissemination to assist in programme advocacy;

(e) In addition to food fortification as a permanent dietary approach, a social marketing approach should be applied to improve the available iron in the diet by increasing vitamin C consumption to enhance absorption, promoting foods with available iron and minimizing the impact of inhibitors of iron absorption in foods;

(f) Dietary approaches should be given prominence on the agenda of the next meeting of the working group.

80. The working group endorsed the conclusion of the working paper on iron overload, i.e., that the potential benefit of iron fortification to a predominantly iron-deficient population greatly outweighs any risk that this may pose for a few individuals.

81. It was decided that SCN will develop and issue a statement for Governments, agencies and organizations, emphasizing the adverse impact of iron deficiency anaemia on maternal mortality, child development, morbidity and mortality, and the risk of impairing the physical and mental capacity of future generations. The UNU representative offered to draft a statement on the need for prioritizing iron deficiency anaemia control in the next few weeks, share it with WHO, and send it by electronic mail to selected experts for their comments.

82. It was also decided that iron deficiency anaemia issues will be included in a broader statement about the nutrition slowdown that will be submitted to ACC.

H. Breastfeeding and complementary feeding

83. At the meeting of the working group (Chairs: Lida Lhotska, (UNICEF) and Elisabet Helsing, (WABA)), the following recommendations were made:

(a) Maternity legislation: mid- versus long-term solution; building on what was meant by 'imaginative legislation' in the Innocenti targets:

(i) ILO, WHO and UNICEF should reinforce their collaboration towards achieving acceptance by Governments of their responsibility to support the rights of working women to breastfeed, recognizing exclusive breastfeeding as important for infant health and well-being, and critical to attaining the highest standard of health. In addition, ILO should focus on sensitizing employers and trade unions of their obligations in this respect;

(ii) Recognizing the ongoing activities of non-governmental organizations, such as WABA, in this area, SCN will draw on their experience in addressing this issue;

(iii) Short-term approaches (mother-friendly workplace) as well as long-term approaches (imaginative maternity legislation) should be implemented in order to facilitate an environment conducive to optimal breastfeeding;

(iv) ILO should review existing conventions and recommendations from a human rights perspective, as expressed in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(b) The care perspective on infant feeding issues: programmatic, environmental and other implications:

(i) Efforts to improve women's and children's nutritional status should be reassessed in order to determine whether inadequate caring practices and a lack of human, economic and organizational resources for care play a significant role in the perpetuation of malnutrition. Based on this reassessment, subsequent adjustments should be made to include care in planning or implementing nutrition programmes;

(c) Complementary feeding: update of the state-of-the-art document currently under preparation by the University of California at Davis group:

(i) The state-of-the-art document should be finalized and widely disseminated in all United Nations languages in an effort to support coordinated actions and to ensure consistency of language/messages related to complementary feeding;

(ii) Agencies should support the identification, evaluation and documentation of complementary feeding policies and projects to facilitate better understanding of processes and effective approaches;

(d) Implementation of the International Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes: new strategies within the framework of the Convention of the Rights of the Child:

(i) All relevant agencies should use the process of reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, pursuant to article 45 of the Convention, as an opportunity to advocate for full implementation and enforcement at the national level of the International Code;

(e) Brief update on the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI):

(i) UNICEF and WHO should continue to support Governments' efforts related to BFHI implementation and integration into health-care systems at the national level;

(ii) UNICEF and WHO should encourage the sustainability of BFHI, in part through the reassessment of hospitals process, placing emphasis on those global criteria that were most difficult to implement initially. Attention was drawn to the problem of pre-lacteal feeding, and it was recommended that WHO alert relevant medical associations to this;

(iii) In order to address the ongoing challenge of BFHI, coordinated and/or collaborative efforts to develop community support for optimal breastfeeding should be encouraged. Although the training of first-line community health workers in breastfeeding and skilled counselling is a first important step, it should be complemented with support for mother-to-mother and other community approaches;

(f) Recommendation for the agenda of the 1998 meeting of the working group (proposed by Norway):

(i) The food security of infants depends totally on breast milk. Infancy is the only time in our life that we depend on only one food for optimal health. Human milk as a food resource, however, is invisible in today's food statistics;

(ii) For the next SCN sessions, the working group, together with FAO, are requested to propose how the economic value of breastfeeding can be quantified and ultimately more widely appreciated. In preparation for that session, SCN requested that further discussions be held between FAO and other members of the working group, in particular with the United States Agency for International Development, who agreed to be a main presenter on this topic.

84. In subsequent discussion of those recommendations by SCN, the ILO representative stated that ratification of all ILO conventions is voluntary, and it is only possible to encourage Governments to ratify. ILO would be pleased to

work with WHO and UNICEF on this subject, and to advocate for mother-friendly workplaces. ILO also works with other constituents, such as employers and workers, and will promote this convention here too.

85. The Advisory Group asked whether the duration of the maternity leave period (three months) could be related more strongly to the recommended period for exclusive breastfeeding. The SIDA representative also suggested that the relevant ILO Convention needs updating, since it in fact states that six weeks of leave need to be taken prior to delivery, leaving only six weeks during the child's life.

86. The SCN Chairman suggested that the maternity leave provision for three months only be reviewed by ILO, WHO and UNICEF.

I. Vitamin A deficiency

87. The working group (Chair: David Alnwick, (UNICEF), Secretary: Martin Bloem, (HKI)) recommendations were presented. There is a task for the SCN Vitamin A working group to revitalize the goal of virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and its consequences. The fact that:

(a) Vitamin A supplementation reduces mortality by 25 per cent in countries where xerophthalmia is prevalent;

(b) Vitamin A supplementation reduces attendance at clinics, hospital admissions, and mortality even in areas with low clinical vitamin A deficiency (VAST study, Ghana) which should continue to be used to advocate that vitamin A deficiency control is a cost-effective health intervention.

88. The group reviewed research and action towards vitamin A deficiency control. It was suggested that SCN hold a meeting at the International Vitamin A Consultancy Group to get a more detailed update from the different organizations working in the field of vitamin A control.

89. An important outcome of the meeting was the recognition that vitamin A deficiency is prevalent not only in preschool children but also in women of reproductive age and in other age groups. Maternal night blindness is an indicator of health risk in both mother and child.

90. It was noted that supplementation programmes will be needed for many years to come in many countries. Instead of wishing to phase out capsules, emphasis should be placed on phasing-in programmes that tackle the underlying and basic causes of vitamin A deficiency.

91. New guidelines are needed:

(a) On assessment of the prevalence of vitamin A deficiency in women of reproductive age and other age groups;

(b) On how to tailor a mix of strategies based on a country profile of vitamin A deficiency;

(c) For Governments, on monitoring their mix of strategies in order to help them to make the shift from government-subsidized programmes to consumer/private-sector-driven programmes;

(d) How to evaluate food-based strategies for their impact on the immediate, underlying and basic causes of vitamin A deficiency.

92. There is a need to investigate how to combine vitamin A supplementation programmes with supplementation of other micronutrients, such as zinc, iron and folate.

93. In subsequent discussions by SCN, the UNDP representative suggested exploration of opportunities for distribution of supplements at the workplace. SCN noted that further investigation is needed of the potential of home gardening and better information on the practical significance of recent advances in the understanding of the bioavailability of carotenoids.

94. SCN suggested that it would be useful to prepare a summary update of the various guidelines, which could be disseminated through a Web site.

95. Overall, it was concluded that individual micronutrient working groups should remain, but that discussion on complementarity of multiple micronutrients would be useful. This could be done by adding the issue to the next working group meeting agenda.

J. Household food security

96. Mr. Jean-Pierre Cotier (FAO) presented the main conclusions of the working group meeting, which he had chaired. Dr. Eileen Kennedy of the Advisory Group on Nutrition had rapporteured the meeting. The working group proposed that:

(a) A workshop be organized by FAO and held in a developing country, possibly in Kenya, on lessons learned from experience for improving efficiency and effectiveness of support to household food security. A proposal has been prepared that foresees a major contribution of specialists from developing countries. Members of the working group will be invited to participate;

(b) A review and analysis of the activities of existing inter-agency mechanisms of consultation on the issue of household food security will be undertaken with a view to encouraging and guiding similar initiatives in other countries.

97. It was agreed that the agency chairing the working group would finalize and send to the members of the working group (with a copy to the SCN secretariat) a detailed work plan based on those main orientations, including a detailed proposal for the workshop. In addition, the following recommendations to SCN were made:

(a) SCN should actively promote a harmonization of the policies of the United Nations agencies and other members with a view to achieving the goal of

household food security, in the context of the ICN Plan of Action and the World Food Summit;

(b) FAO, as Chair of this working group, should take action to facilitate the collection and analysis of lessons learned by SCN members in the field of household food security and to assist in the dissemination of this information.

98. SCN discussed those recommendations. Two main difficulties were expressed by the Chairman of the working group. The working group is not well structured: it has had a rapid rotation of chairmanship, which has affected continuity; and no new activities of the working group since the Accra meeting have been reported. Dr. Kennedy suggested that nevertheless, there were sufficient important technical issues for the working group to continue.

99. The ILO representative asked about the proposed workshop. It was suggested that the workshop and exercise on lessons learned could be linked with each other. FAO responded that for the workshop in Kenya, it would be necessary to ensure that the main actors were developing country practitioners, and that lessons learned would be discussed. The output could be developed later as an SCN publication.

K. Nutrition of school-age children

100. SCN was informed that a meeting of the working group will be held at the twenty-fifth session.

L. Report on the follow-up to the International Conference on Nutrition and the World Food Summit

101. A report entitled 'Joint FAO/WHO progress report on the implementation of the ICN World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition' had been distributed. FAO also drew attention to a letter from FAO to the SCN Chairman, which states that FAO believes that it would be cost-efficient to utilize the FAO/WHO report available as an overall SCN report to ACC, and to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. He stated that FAO had liaised with all United Nations agencies, and requested their contributions to the report, which has now been translated into three languages. FAO is developing normative and operational activities to support the preparation of national plans of action for nutrition (NPANs).

102. Regarding the World Food Summit, the FAO representative indicated that since the participants had already read the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action, he would limit his intervention to a few remarks. He stated that the Summit has been important in many respects, in particular in confirming a near consensus as the main features of the global problem of food insecurity as it now prevails. First, the Summit reaffirmed that the dimensions of the problem of hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable. Second, those problems are primarily caused by poverty and intensified by political instability in certain countries. Third, food security, which is the main issue, has three dimensions: availability of food,

stability of supply, and access for all to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Fourth, the Summit reaffirmed that the availability of enough food for all can be attained.

103. The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action contains seven areas of commitments to be acted upon. The FAO representative said that he would limit his remarks to three immediate areas of intervention: (a) the continuation with increased intensity of support to Rwanda; (b) the initiation of a special programme in support to food security which will be implemented in low-income food deficit countries, the main goal of which is to assist countries in rapidly increasing their food production, farm productivity and access to food through employment expansion; and (c) FAO is developing a new information system, the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS). FAO has convened an expert consultation to discuss FIVIMS, which will take place in Rome on 24 and 25 March 1997.

104. ILO welcomed the conclusions, which emphasized the relationship between food insecurity and poverty and the fact that food production is not the only part of the problem. The World Summit for Social Development follow-up was also seen as relevant. The fact that the amount of food distributed by WFP is dropping is of serious concern.

105. UNICEF stated that it was inaccurate to suggest that the joint progress report was a product of collaboration with UNICEF since no draft had been seen before the report had been finalized. Although UNICEF has not yet had a chance to fully review this document, it is evident that progress in combating young child nutrition is not covered. Moreover, it is not at all clear how much progress has been made towards the quantitative goals agreed at ICN; the report, on the other hand, tends to focus on the number of meetings held and documents prepared.

106. FAO responded to say that the written contribution to the report which had been requested and received from UNICEF had been incorporated in the report. However, any further statement from UNICEF in addition to the printed report would be welcome, although the report cannot be revised.

107. The representative of Italy asked whether explicit nutritional issues had been included in the Special Programme on Food Security, and questioned the degree to which the FAO nutrition division had been directly involved. The representative of Norway asked whether an attempt had been made to carry out a follow-up within the United Nations on the Summit, and if so, whether SCN would have a role. How many other United Nations agencies have been asked to participate in the follow-up?

108. The representative of the World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights suggested that the FAO-proposed improvement to food security and vulnerability mapping would need to be related to the reporting guidelines for nutrition and human rights. He urged follow-up with respect to the right to food and establishment of links to follow-up of ICN with that of the Summit.

109. The World Bank expressed disappointment that, since there were no quantitative goals in the Summit except the reduction of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015, SCN should therefore be primarily concerned with achievement of the goals of ICN. In this it will be necessary to focus on impact and not just process - to go beyond mere quantification of numbers of NPANs to ask the question: "Did ICN make a difference?". Five years after ICN, nutrition trends are worsening. As SCN members, we should be self-critical and send forward to ACC information on both the nutrition situation and country-level action, and make a plea for more action beyond plan preparation. The World Bank noted that the report, for example, is completely silent on the issue of famine deaths, despite this being one agreed goal for which recent pertinent information is available.

110. SIDA concurred with the need to follow up on both the action and the goals. Achievement of goals may or may not be related to the ICN-influenced policies and programmes.

111. The SCN Chairman stated that it would be necessary for the agencies to gain better access to the NPANs, if they were to be meaningfully involved. The FAO representative replied that as far as FAO is concerned, all requests for a copy of plans in its possession had been satisfied.

112. WHO suggested that there were several excellent reports on malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and other goals of ICN available and presented to SCN. Those could be combined with the current FAO/WHO progress report. WHO also expressed disappointment that the ICN follow-up session had dealt largely with the FAO/WHO report, and suggested that it should have focused on follow-up action of all SCN members.

113. The SCN Chairman concluded the discussion by suggesting that (a) the ICN process had increased the priority attached to nutrition action in countries, but that (b) the process of involvement of other SCN agencies had not been as open as it should have been. This has been made clear both in this meeting and at the twenty-third session at Accra. All agencies should have been part of that process.

114. An SCN statement entitled "Meeting the nutrition challenge: a call to arms" has been prepared (attached as annex IV). It was agreed that:

(a) The statement would be forwarded to the heads of agencies of all SCN members and observers, along with a copy of the joint FAO/WHO progress report. A covering letter would request that the statement and report be shared with member Governments of the various annual agency meetings, such as the World Health Assembly, the FAO Conference and Council, and the UNICEF Executive Board;

(b) The FAO/WHO report, the UNICEF report, the SCN statement and the SCN Update on the Nutrition Situation should be combined and forwarded to ACC, and then to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly;

(c) The four reports would also be sent to the resident coordinators, with a request that they be taken up and discussed with government representatives at

the highest level, as well as with government counterparts and relevant field agencies, in order to encourage priorities and urgent nutrition action;

(d) The reports and statements would also be used for general advocacy. The SCN statement would be published in SCN News and the UNU Food and Nutrition Bulletin, and shared with the press at strategic events, such as the launch of the State of the World's Children;

(e) It was also suggested that the SCN Chairman seek an appointment with the United Nations Secretary-General to apprise him of the situation and urgent need for action.

115. In addition:

(a) FAO agreed to provide, on request, photocopies of NPANs in its possession to all interested SCN members;

(b) The SCN secretariat will explore how to prepare a further report on ICN follow-up for the next SCN session. In so doing, the proposal of the Advisory Group to return to the same 10 countries for which case studies were prepared for the IUNS Congress in Adelaide will be considered. FAO indicated that its future reporting will not be specifically limited to ICN but will also include the follow-up to the World Food Summit;

(c) The approach of sending out country questionnaires that focus on the process surrounding NPAN preparation and subsequent action should also be considered by FAO and WHO and any other agencies. Such an approach will need to elicit as far as possible what has actually been happening on the ground in those countries as a result of the ICN process, and with what impact.

116. FAO endorsed those proposals. NPANs are national plans of action for consideration by the entire United Nations and donor system, not just FAO. There is a role for SCN in considering ICN along with the World Food Summit. FAO indicated that a large component of the Special Programme on Food Security is on socio-economic questions, and that several parts refer to participation, the involvement of women and to dietary and nutrition aspects. Concerning contacts between FAO and other agencies on the follow-up to the Summit, they have been immediately established and they are being pursued.

117. WHO concurred that all United Nations agencies and bilaterals had a role in ICN follow-up. WHO will welcome the proposal for SCN to combine the joint report with SCN reports on nutrition trends and achievement of quantitative goals. Also, bilaterals could make a commitment to contribute a description of their involvement in follow-up. SCN is the appropriate body to draw such reports together.

M. Agency reports

118. The United Nations agencies were invited to report on activities in their agencies:

(a) FAO informed the group of an expert consultation on carbohydrates to be held with WHO in April;

(b) WFP was to hold a workshop on maternal and child health interventions, to be held on 28 and 29 April 1997. WFP further stated that its in-house nutritional expertise is increasing;

(c) UNHCR has doubled its nutritional capacity, thanks to the generosity of the Government of the Netherlands, which provided a nutritionist for the two-year period July 1996-1998. There is an inter-agency group, comprised of many non-governmental organizations who meet once a year to discuss technical issues related to nutrition in emergencies. The next meeting will be hosted by MSF-Holland on assessment techniques;

(d) UNU called the group's attention to the publication distributed, and in particular drew attention to the fact that the International Network of Food Data Systems project now covers almost all countries in the world;

(e) UNICEF stated that child and maternal nutrition is a priority. There is concern in the agency over the lack of progress in decreasing levels of malnutrition worldwide, and programmes should be established with a human rights approach to nutrition. There is a restructuring within UNICEF which will lead to further decentralization. The 1998 State of the World's Children (to be published in December 1997) will focus on nutrition, and it was felt this would be useful in raising the profile of nutrition. UNICEF will develop a network to facilitate information exchange on maternal nutrition;

(f) WHO is continuing its work to support member States in producing national plans of action, and technical work is continuing in six priority areas. Over 50 publications have been produced since ICN, and many global and regional workshops have been held, with several more planned for 1997. SCN hoped that in any restructuring within WHO, the Division of Publications would be strengthened, thereby speeding up the publications process;

(g) ILO stated that its work on poverty has a link to nutrition, and it is willing to share its information, particularly on standard-setting in maternity protection and worker feeding programmes, with SCN members;

(h) UNFPA increasingly recognizes the importance of nutrition in promoting reproductive health and the quality of life in general. Without addressing their nutritional needs, it would not be possible to reach various goals related to reduction of maternal, infant and child mortality, an effort in which UNFPA is substantially involved. Addressing the gender aspects in nutrition is another area of UNFPA's focus and intervention, and it is highly appreciative of the commitment of SCN in that area. It also acknowledges the valuable guidance of SCN in highlighting the various technical and operational nutritional issues, and supports its various initiatives;

(i) IDECG informed the group of a meeting held in November 1996 on intra-uterine growth retardation, for which a report will be available by the end of 1997. The next meeting will discuss the upper and lower limits of calories to be provided by macronutrients in different age groups. The IDECG publications are widely distributed and are free of charge.

119. The bilateral group expressed its appreciation for the SCN session being held in a developing country, because it allows for the participation of local experts. The group was pleased with the topic of the symposium and the new Technical Secretary. Some concern was expressed over the apparent lack of commitment of some agencies to nutrition. The bilateral agencies were pleased with the organization of the session and working groups, but suggested a need for rules on running the working groups, which might cover chairing, presentations in the working groups, recommendations, and presentation to the SCN session. The bilateral participation in the process of Advisory Group member selection is appreciated, and special thanks were expressed to Ms. Julia Tagwireyi, outgoing Chair of the Advisory Group. Almost universal support for the budget was acknowledged. The bilateral agencies were pleased that the issue of possible conflicts of interest is being addressed, and concluded by requesting that a two-hour meeting be set up for the bilaterals before the regular SCN session.

Notes

[1] Suggested footnote to budget financing table (table 1): "In the event that part or all of the contributions under review are not received, budget expenditure would be reduced or covered by other contributions".

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairman: Dr. R. Jolly

Technical Secretary: Dr. S. Rabeneck

Special guests: Abraham Horwitz, Director Emeritus, PanAmerican Health Organization

Bal Gopal Baidya, Planning Commission, Government of Nepal

Naeem Hasan Secretary-General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

Caroll Long, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Nepal

United Nations

United Nations Children's Fund	D. Alnwick M. Arole D. Clark U. Jonsson L. Lhotska
United Nations Development Programme	R. Jolly S. K. Kumar Range
United Nations Population Fund	V. Rai G. Walker
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	R. Bhatia
United Nations University	A. Besrat N. S. Scrimshaw
World Food Programme	P. Dijkhuizen C. Van Nieuwenhuyse

Specialized agencies

International Labour Organization	R. Islam
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	J.-P. Cotier R. Dawson P. Van Rappard

World Health Organization	G. Clugston S. Khanum W. Piggot
World Bank	J. McGuire
International Atomic Energy agency	R. Parr
Advisory Group on Nutrition	J. Jervell E. Kennedy R. Oniango J. Tagwireyi (Chair) K. Tontisirin R. Uauy
Secretariat of the Subcommittee	S. Rabeneck A. Groenendijk J. Hedley J. Wallace
Rapporteurs	S. Gillespie A. Groenendijk
Bilateral agencies	
Denmark	B. Holm Sorensen
Finland	K. Hasunen
Germany	R. Gross
Italy	A. Ferro-Luzzi
Netherlands	N. M. Leemhuis-de Regt
Norway	G. Holmboe-Ottesen A. Oshaug
Sweden	T. Greiner
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	S. Ismail
United States of America	F. Davidson H. Goldman
Non-governmental organizations	
Helen Keller International	M. Bloem S. Burger D. Davis

International Union of Nutritional Sciences	Represented by N. Scrimshaw (UNU)
International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders	F. Delange C. S. Pandav
International Development Research Centre	J. Johnston
International Dietary Energy Consultancy Group	B. Schurch
Micronutrient Initiative	M. Lotfi V. Mannar
World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action	E. Helsing
World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights	W. Barth Eide S. Damman G. Kent U. Kracht

Symposium presenters

D. Chirmulaye
R. Gross
U. Jonsson
R. Islam
S. Osmani
V. Vyas

Others

Dr. A. Haq Jabar Khalil
K. Belbase
A. Bello
P. O. Blomquist
A. Fernandez
C. A. Florencio
H. Faundez-Ledesma
G. Gleason
O. Gillie
J. Green
J. Goodwin
K. Islam
E. Namgyal
P. Koniz-Booher
M. Krantz
S. LeClerq
C. McConnell
K. Mizannus Rahman
S. Nirupam
Dr. Nuzhat-Ahmad
G. Paiella
S. Paiella
D. Parker
L. Pearson
T. Rana
S. Pandey
S. Skatvedt
R. K. Shrestha
S. Vir
O. Yamboi
R. Yip

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Item	Background material	Code
SCN twenty-third session	Report on the twenty-third session of SCN, Accra	SCN 97 SCN23 Rep
List of participants	Provisional list of participants at SCN twenty-fourth session	SCN 97 Participants
Nutrition, ethics and human rights	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 907 Hrights Agenda
	Letter from Chairman, questionnaire	
	Note from WANAHR on WFS follow-up	
	The Human Right to Food (E. Messer)	
	WANAHR Bulletin #6	
Iron deficiency control	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 97 Iron Agenda
Vitamin A	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 96 VitA Agenda
Household food security	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 97 HFS Agenda
Iodine deficiency disorders	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 97 IDD Agenda
Breastfeeding and complementary feeding	Agenda for working group meeting	SCN 97 Bfdg Agenda
Symposium on the theme 'Nutrition and poverty'	Symposium agenda	SCN Symp Agenda
	Abstracts of presentations to be available at meeting	
Report on the World Nutrition Situation	Third Report on the World Nutrition Situation:	
	Update on the nutrition situation 1996	SCN 97 3RWNS Update
	Draft micronutrient chapter	SCN 97 3RWNS Micronutrient
	Draft refugee chapter	SCN 97 3RWNS Refugees
	Draft malnutrition trends chapter	SCN 97 3RWNS Trends
Advisory Group on Nutrition	Report on meetings of the Advisory Group on Nutrition:	
	(a) February 1996 meeting, Accra	SCN 97 AGN RepA
	(b) November 1996 meeting, Ottawa	SCN 97 AGN RepB

Item	Background material	Code
New challenges	(a) Role of the United Nations in the nutrition challenge in the twenty-first century	SCN 97 Challenge
	(b) Sixteenth IUNS International Congress of Nutrition	SCN 97 Challenge B
	(c) New orientations to research and training to improve the effectiveness of nutrition programmes	SCN 97 Challenge C
Nutrition of refugees and displaced people	Report of working group meeting (Dublin, February 1997), RNIS report # 19	SCN 97 Refugee Rep RNIS Report # 19
Follow-up to the International Conference on Nutrition and the World Food Summit	Joint FAO/WHO progress report on the implementation of the ICN World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition (1996), and FAO letter of 15 January 1997	FAO document W2313 SCN 97 ICN
Executive session	Agenda	SCN 97 Exec Agenda
	Programme budget and financing 1998-1999	SCN 97 Budget
International Dietary Energy Consultative Group	1996 annual report	IDECG Annual Report 1996

Annex III

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
(Oslo, 30 March-3 April 1998)

1. Symposium on the theme "Challenges for the twenty-first century: a gender perspective on nutrition through the life cycle".

2. Reporting on the World Nutrition Situation.

3. Report of Advisory Group on Nutrition.

4. Reports of decisions taken in working groups.

5. Executive session.

6. Follow-up to the International Conference on Nutrition and the World Food Summit.

7. Nutrition in the twenty-first century: what role for the United Nations?

8. Workshop report on new programme orientations malnutrition.

9. Workshop on new orientations to training and research to improve programme implementation.

10. Follow-up to IUNS, Montreal.

11. Agency reports.

12. Report from bilateral agencies.

Weekend meetings:

Discussion on complementarity of multiple micronutrients
Breastfeeding and complementary feeding
Household food security
Iodine deficiency disorders
Iron deficiency control
Nutrition education and behavioural change
Nutrition, ethics and human rights
Nutrition of refugees and displaced people
Nutrition of school-age children
Vitamin A

Annex IV

STATEMENT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION: MEETING THE NUTRITION CHALLENGE: A CALL TO ARMS

The latest evidence suggests a slowdown in the rate of nutritional advance in many regions of the world and a downturn in some countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa. This is a most worrying trend, totally contrary to the commitments of the International Conference on Nutrition and the World Food Summit. Not only is it contrary to commitments but it is unnecessary. Even over the last five years, dramatic advances have been demonstrated in some areas of nutrition, most specifically in reducing by 1.5 billion the number of people at risk from iodine deficiency disorders. Clearly, the world can make progress in nutrition through forthright action by the international community combined with commitment by countries.

In 1992, on the occasion of the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), and with the participation of United Nations organizations and other concerned agencies, the Governments of 159 States adopted the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, thereby declaring their determination to eliminate hunger and reduce all forms of malnutrition. They also reiterated their commitment to the nutrition goals of other United Nations conferences, including the 1990 World Summit for Children. At the World Food Summit in 1996, Governments and United Nations agencies declared that it was intolerable that more than 800 million people do not have sufficient food to meet their needs, and reaffirmed the right of all to adequate nutrition and food security.

By adopting the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition at ICN, Governments agreed to develop national plans of action, with technical expertise from United Nations agencies. Moreover, all concerned agencies of the United Nations system were urged to define ways and means of giving appropriate priority to their nutrition-related programmes so as to ensure vigorous and coordinated implementation of activities recommended in the ICN Declaration and Plan of Action. ACC/SCN accepted a special responsibility for facilitating coordination of the follow-up to ICN.

SCN brings to your attention the joint FAO/WHO progress report on the implementation of the ICN World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, and the mid-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children prepared by UNICEF in 1996 as part of the reporting process to monitor progress in achieving the goals of ICN and the Summit. We note with satisfaction that 106 countries have prepared national plans of action for nutrition. Most countries in which the national plan has been endorsed by the Government are now actively pursuing its implementation. However, several countries, particularly the poorest, still lack the human and financial resources necessary for implementation, and this is a matter of concern to SCN. A major achievement of ICN and the World Summit for Children was the raising of awareness of nutrition problems and their links to physical and mental development, and thus to productivity and economic progress.

Despite real efforts, the latest evidence shows a slowdown in nutritional progress and in some regions a downturn. Nearly five years after ICN and nearly seven years after the World Summit for Children, and despite very real progress by countries in developing and strengthening their food and nutrition policies and programmes, the global impact on nearly all forms of malnutrition falls far short of that required to meet the goals for the year 2000. SCN expresses deep concern that nearly 200 million children under five years of age - well over a third of all children in developing countries - still continue to be malnourished. Furthermore, recent analyses indicate that 56 per cent of young child deaths in developing countries are associated with malnutrition.

In some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the stagnation of nutritional improvement combined with a rapid rise in population has resulted in an actual increase in the total number of malnourished children. If current trends continue, no region except Latin America and the Caribbean will reach the ICN and WSC goals for the reduction of child malnutrition by the year 2000. SCN also draws attention to the lack of progress in tackling iron deficiency anaemia, which affects the health and development of tens of millions of children and women in spite of the availability of practical low-cost interventions.

Over the past five years, the international community, through WFP and UNHCR, has been able to meet each year the minimum food requirements of 25 million victims of man-made or natural disasters. There have been undoubted improvements in the emergency response to crisis, as well as in ration planning, distribution and monitoring. Starvation and major outbreaks of micronutrient deficiency diseases have been averted in recent crises. However, although the minimum quantity of food has been made available, there remains considerable room for improvement in the quality of rations, particularly the micronutrient content.

The sociopolitical situation in many countries of Africa has led to massive population displacement, rendering an estimated population of over 2 million people inaccessible to humanitarian assistance. Mortality rates among refugees and displaced persons in some makeshift camps in Zaire have been 10 times the normal rate due to security and political events leading to severe disruption of aid deliveries. While SCN is encouraged by the improvement in the levels of malnutrition among refugee populations, as indicated by estimates of trends, it is deeply concerned that most internally displaced and inaccessible populations remain at high nutritional risk.

To maintain consumption and meet emergency needs, estimated food needs worldwide for grain will nearly double over the next decade. At the same time, global food aid deliveries have been continuously reduced since 1993, resulting in the priority allocation of food aid to emergency situations at the expense of development projects. SCN wishes to bring to the attention of Governments and United Nations agencies the impact that that shift will have on enabling poor rural people to improve their household food security and meet their nutritional requirements.

Although further action to combat undernutrition is needed, attention must also be directed towards problems of diet-related diseases, such as chronic

degenerative diseases and obesity. Those conditions are assuming an alarming significance, not only in industrialized nations but also in developing countries, where they coexist with undernutrition, reflecting shifts in lifestyle and dietary habits. The changing demographic profile of the world population, with a progressive increase in the proportion of elderly people, demands that attention and action be specifically directed to address the food and other needs of that vulnerable group. In the face of increasing rural to urban migration and AIDS-related deaths of young adults, as well as decreasing family size, we can no longer assume that the elderly are cared for adequately within extended families.

On the positive side, SCN wishes to highlight the dramatic progress that has been made in combatting iodine deficiency disorders. In 1990, about 30 per cent of the world's population was at risk of iodine deficiency, and an estimated 43 million people were affected by some degree of mental impairment as a result of inadequate iodine intake before or during infancy and early childhood. As a result of efforts catalysed by both the World Summit for Children and ICN, it is estimated that 1.5 billion people have started consuming iodized salt for the first time, resulting in the protection of 12 million infants every year from mental retardation. SCN is pleased to report that if progress is maintained, the goal of virtual elimination of iodine deficiency disorders will be attained by the year 2000. Key factors responsible for that success include the determination and commitment of Governments, the significant role played by SCN in promoting a consensus among the United Nations agencies on the nature of the problem and appropriate solutions, the willingness of the donor community to support well developed and targeted national programmes, and the recognition of the need for partnerships with the private sector.

There is need to adopt a holistic approach to the prevention of malnutrition. There is now general recognition that malnutrition is not simply the result of inadequate food availability or inadequate access to health services and a clean environment. The quality of care and feeding offered to children, which is critically dependent on women's education, social status and workload, is now seen as a significant contributing factor. Special efforts should include the improvement of the situation of women, with particular attention to their health and nutrition throughout the life cycle, and the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding, together with appropriate complementary feeding and better care of young children. All strategies to combat malnutrition should be firmly based on the principles of community participation, and should include appropriate monitoring systems. Further action is also needed in order to improve the response to food emergencies, design appropriate safety nets for the most vulnerable in such emergencies, and find political solutions to allow humanitarian access to those in need.

SCN, through its coordinating efforts, has identified the tools needed for successful action. At our annual meetings, through presentations and discussion at SCN symposia and by examining case studies of successful nutrition interventions, we have refined those tools and stand ready to meet the challenge of reducing malnutrition. We view with concern, however, the lack of priority accorded to nutrition in some member organizations of SCN. Member Governments must also construct policies that facilitate and support nutrition action.

Strengthening national institutions is a key element in meeting the human resource requirements for the implementation of nutrition programmes.

SCN strongly urges Governments, United Nations organizations and the donor community to redouble their efforts towards tackling the problem of malnutrition. The continuing scandal of widespread malnutrition is a clear violation of human rights, in particular the rights of the child. Economic growth is an essential but not sufficient prerequisite for progress in efforts to reduce the prevalence of malnutrition. The adoption of deliberate strategies to tackle the poverty-malnutrition nexus, with full community participation, are urgently needed. SCN calls upon Governments and the international community to respond to this urgent plea for action.

Annex V

REPORT OF THE BILATERAL GROUP

Holding the meeting in a developing country has enabled the participation of regional experts in the symposium. We feel that their participation could be expanded, yet maintaining the high quality. We appreciated the choice of topic for the Symposium and felt that some interesting concepts and facts were presented and discussed.

The bilaterals are pleased with the new Technical Secretary to SCN, who has taken up the work since 10 February 1997. We appreciate the work done by the secretariat of the Subcommittee during difficult times and within a short period before the annual Session.

We look forward to the opportunity of working with the new Technical Secretary and the Chairman of SCN, who has been re-elected by acclamation. The meetings took place in a prevalently constructive spirit. However, there is still room for improvement, especially concerning practical organizational matters.

The bilaterals discussed a number of topics, as set out below.

- The International Conference on Nutrition and the 1997 World Food Summit should focus new energy and resources on nutrition; however, there is some cause for concern. Therefore, we presented a statement during the meeting (appendix).

- We appreciate the efforts under way to improve the functioning of the United Nations Secretariat, in line with recommendations of the bilateral external review, as adopted at the twenty-third session of SCN, held at Accra in 1996;

- It is appreciated that the working group meetings were scheduled on the weekend before the official session, and that there were no parallel sessions. The bilaterals strongly felt that a clear set of rules needs to be set for the organization, chairing, presentation and decision-making in the working groups, as well as for the presentation of recommendations in the SCN regular session.

- We are pleased that the important role of the bilaterals in the process of nominating members of the Advisory Group on Nutrition has been approved. We would also like to be involved in a review of the terms of reference and requirements for Advisory Group membership. In particular, we believe AGN members should commit themselves to participating at all SCN meetings; that commitment should be secured before appointment is finalized.

- We would like it to go on record that we thank the outgoing Chair of the Advisory Group, Julia Tagwireyi, for her contribution to international nutrition.

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- The bilaterals observed that the SCN secretariat obtained almost universal support for their 1998-1999 work plan and budgets. We therefore note with concern that there are two agencies that have chosen to withdraw their contribution, and FAO has chosen to criticize the budget. We would have wished that the new FAO delegation and the SCN secretariat could work in partnership. The bilaterals expect that FAO and the new secretariat will continue their dialogue to find a solution to collaborate for better international nutrition.

- The bilaterals note with pleasure that the issue of conflict of interest is being tackled. We emphasize the need to apply those principles in all SCN acceptance of funding, including funding of the working groups.

- We, the bilaterals, exchanged information on actions undertaken by a number of bilaterals after the publication of the report Cracking the Code, which noted recent evidence that the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes continues to be violated.

- We highly recommend to the Secretariat that at future SCN sessions, a reservation be made on the agenda for at least a two-hour meeting of the bilateral representatives to SCN before the start of the official SCN session.

Appendix

BILATERAL STATEMENT ON THE POSITION OF NUTRITION IN SOME MEMBER AGENCIES OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION

The bilateral representatives at the twenty-fourth session of the ACC Subcommittee on Nutrition wish to express their concern regarding the position of nutrition in at least some of the member agencies of SCN.

They fear that the staffing levels of some agencies may have been reduced to such a low level that the technical requests of the member countries cannot be met. The need for general budgetary constraints is recognized; however, those constraints should not impinge upon nutrition units or divisions in an unbalanced fashion.